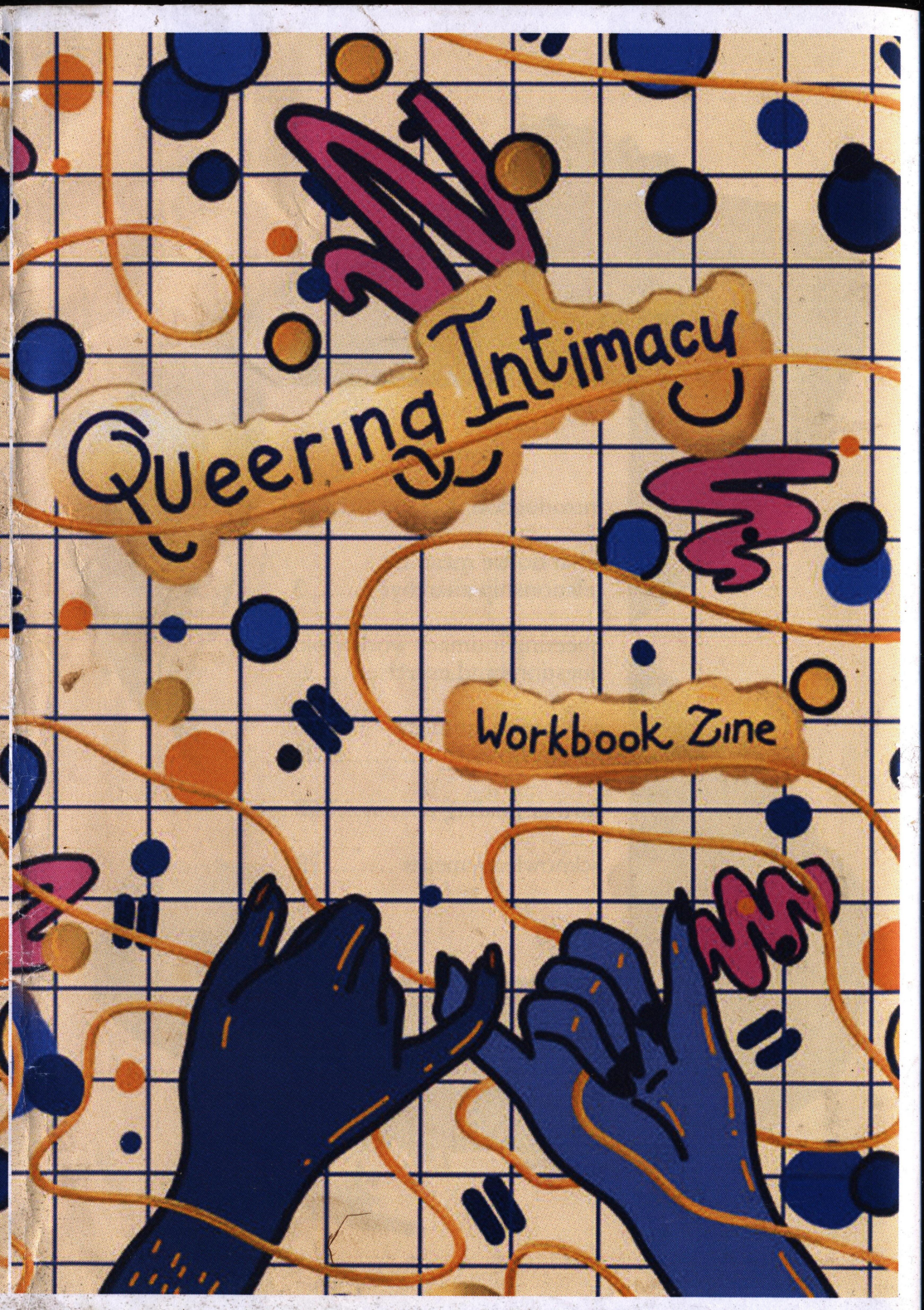
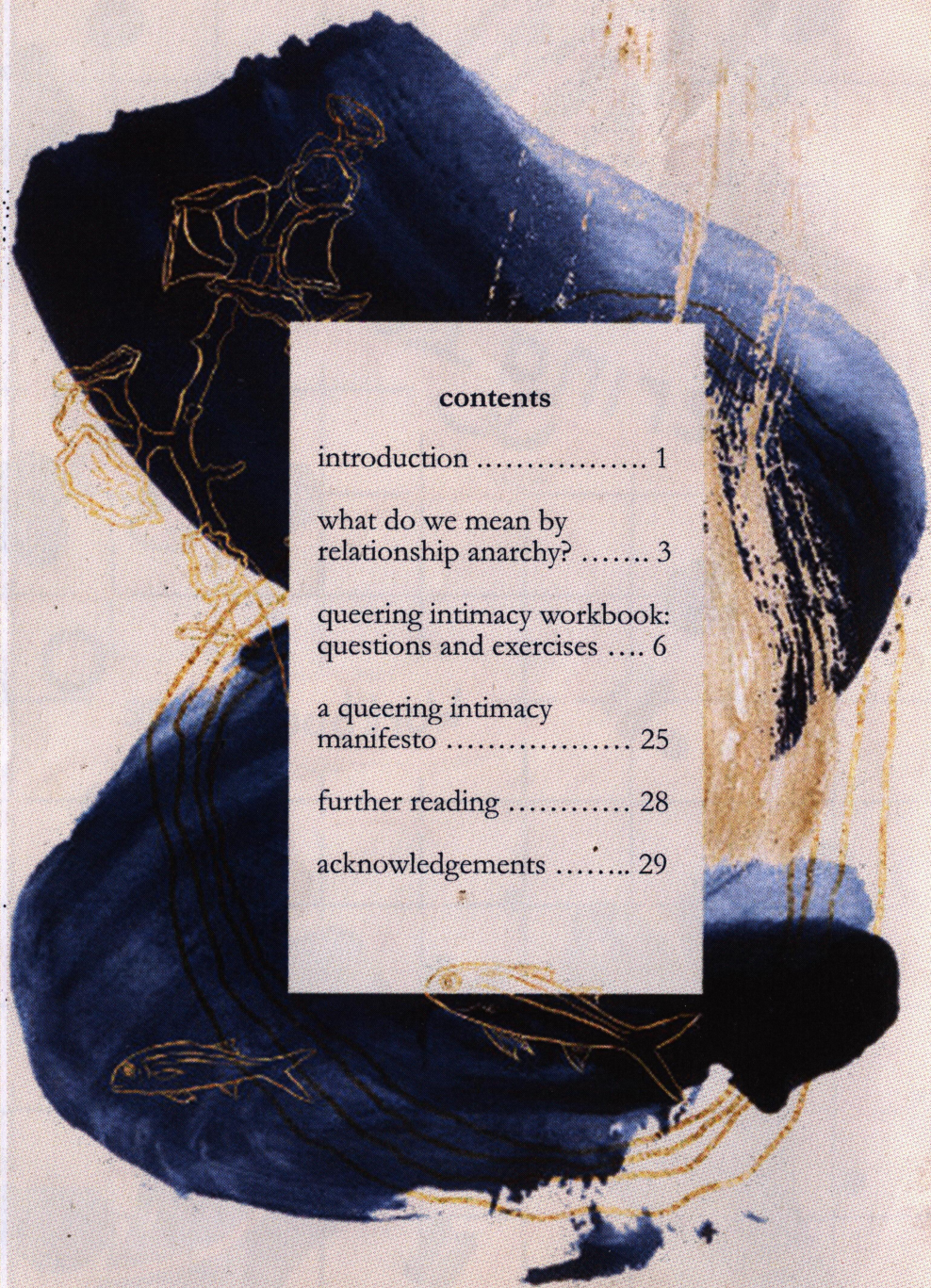
Queering Intimacy

Workbook Zine





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introduction

Welcome to the Queering Intimacy zine! This workbook has been designed as a guide to help you explore the concept of intimacy, and how it is expressed in the relationships in your life. We hope it will help you to think critically about intimacy, imagine different kinds of intimacies, and give you some ideas for fostering relationships that align with your values and desires.

The ideas in this zine originate from a series of workshops that we ran a few years ago with queer and activist groups in the UK. One of us was part of the *FUCKED* project, which created zines and workshops on navigating sexual dysfunction in sex-positive queer spaces from 2014-2016, and in some ways the Queering Intimacy workshops were a natural progression from *FUCKED*, a way of moving beyond and through dysfunction, trauma, and sexuality in order to interrogate and explore *all* kinds of intimate relationships with the self and other(s).

When putting this workshop together we wanted to create something which would allow participants to consider intimacy beyond the usual romantic and sexual partnerships (including non-monogamous ones), and instead imagine the potential for connections outside of the couple form, outside of romance and sex, and beyond the human. We wanted to queer the notion of intimacy itself, to free it from its usual connotations and associations in order to conceptualise the potential for new ways of being with and relating to others.

This zine can be used either as a workbook that you complete individually, or as the template for running a workshop or discussion space with friends, communities or groups that you are part of. As it is physically impossible to run these

workshops everywhere that we'd like, we're offering this zine as a resource to enable you to facilitate your own events. There are open-ended questions throughout the zine which can be used as journaling prompts or topics for discussion, and we offer suggestions for when it might make sense to split these discussions into smaller groups.

This zine starts with a short introduction to relationship anarchy, as the foundation and inspiration for much of what follows. The main body of the workbook follows, after which we propose a Queering Intimacy manifesto, which connects the ideas and practices in the zine within a wider framework for creating liberatory movements. Finally, we include lots and lots of additional resources and references: though we rarely quote anyone directly within the zine, the content and ideas in the workbook are influenced by a multitude of writers, thinkers, and relaters. Having explored these concepts over a span of many years, it is sometimes impossible to trace exact sources of ideas; however we hope you will find many interesting threads to follow out of this zine and into the messy web of relationship radicals and revolutionaries who have inspired us.

We welcome any feedback on the zine and would love to hear about your experiences of working with the material, either individually or as a group. You can reach us at lettersfrommars@protonmail.com or follow us on Instagram @lettersfrommars

Happy relating!

The Queering Intimacy Collective

Brighton, UK
January 2022

what do we mean by relationship anarchy?

This zine has been created by people who have practiced and/or been inspired by relationship anarchy for many years. To give a fuller picture of the context that this zine has been written in, we therefore wanted to provide a brief overview of relationship anarchy as a concept and as a practice, as we know the term may not be familiar to everyone.

Relationship anarchy is a way of doing relationships that emphasises autonomy, non-hierarchy, and liberation from the heterosexist and oppressive norms which govern (Western)[1] society's ideas of 'proper' or 'normal' relationships. One of the first pieces of writing on RA is Andie Nordgren's 'Relationship Anarchy Manifesto', published online in 2006. Inspired by discussions on polyamory and non-monogamy, some of the key components of this manifesto include cherishing each relationship in its specificity; intentionally choosing commitments you desire, rather than doing things because you 'should'; building trust, communication and flexibility in relationships; and discerning and practicing your own relationship values, even when they conflict with societal norms. We think this is a great starting point for rethinking relationships and highly recommend reading the manifesto online.

[1] We write this zine as queer people living in the UK; the society we refer to here is the capitalist, white supremacist, cisheteropatriarchal one that we live in, which shares many similarities with other Anglocentric cultures and which has been enforced upon other countries (with varying levels of 'success') around the world via violent colonialism and imperialism. There is an incredible amount of variation globally when it comes to ideas about relationships and intimacy, and local and Indigenous relationship practices are often repressed and delegitimised as part of this process of colonisation. We do not intend or expect this workbook to be universally applicable or relevant, but we hope that it is useful as one tool among many in dismantling and resisting these systems of oppression.

However, as anarchists we are also interested in taking seriously the anarchism of relationship anarchy. Straight society tells us that the ideal relationship is a married, hetero, monogamous one, where you consolidate private property together, raise kids, and are financially intertwined (usually with a woman dependent upon a man). The nuclear family you create in this way becomes a key site of economic and social reproduction, and is legislatively and financially encouraged by the state. It is, of course, always a white family that is imagined as ideal here. To reinforce this economic model, straight society also tells us that the relationship with your spouse is the most important one, and the one where you get all of your sexual and emotional needs met.

Yet as queer people, we have historically been (and still often are) excluded from many of these institutions and so-called opportunities. The criminalisation and oppression of queer acts and relationships often forces queers into isolation, precarity and poverty. This combination of familial rejection, financial insecurity and institutional neglect has meant that queers have a long history of doing relationships differently. Anarchistic practices of mutual aid have long been crucial to queer survival, whether that be care, advocacy and protest work during the AIDS crisis, community-led support networks for sex workers, or knowledge-sharing and harm reduction schemes for trans people using HRT. Relationships outside of the family - with friends, lovers we cannot (or could not) marry, community members - become even more important in queer lives when we cannot access support from birth family or the state.

And although queer forms of relationship often arise through necessity, in queerness we also find a celebration and a liberation in doing things differently. Precisely because queerness operates outside of mainstream legal structures and the nuclear family, in the rejection of compulsory heterosexuality we find models and opportunities to live creatively and intentionally. We are thinking here of queer communes and co-ops, group co-parenting, drag families,

friendship as a way of life, non-monogamous networks of lovers, political lesbianism's utopian visions of life without men, queer squats, cats and their dykes, sex parties and kink communities, queer liberation movements, romantic friendships, queerplatonic relationships… The list goes on!

We therefore view relationship anarchy as a fundamentally queer practice, and interpersonal relationships as an active site of anarchist struggle. RA is queer in the sense of anti-assimilationism, of tearing down oppressive norms, of thinking critically about desire and pleasure; and anarchist in its rejection of hierarchies, its valuing of autonomy and interdependence, and its desire for freedom from the state. We believe that the straight, cisgender nuclear family is at its core an oppressive, capitalist and racist institution and we do not want to reproduce its norms, even if we could. Although queer liberation will always be a collective movement, and despite the fact that our options are materially limited by the society we live in, we still think it is useful and important to critically consider our own interpersonal relationships, and to find ways to live that are as joyous, authentic and fulfilling as possible. (We discuss in more detail the tensions between desires and practical realities later on in this zine.)

When we talk about queering intimacy then, we are coming at it from the framework of radical, anti-capitalist, relationship anarchy. Although RA originated within polyamorous and non-monogamous communities, this is not a zine (only) about polyamory. We believe that RA can be a tool for thinking beyond monogamy and non-monogamy, and a process for valuing relationships outside of romantic/sexual partnerships. Whilst sexual and romantic relationships are important to many people (including us), thinking through the lens of relationship anarchy gives us the opportunity to consider all forms of intimacy and relationship. We do not have to think of romantic partners as the default most important people in our life and of the nuclear family as an ultimate end goal; instead we can decide

which relationships we want to prioritise, what brings us joy, and what we truly desire. By bringing this queer, anarchist lens to bear upon intimacy and relationships, we hope to offer new perspectives on what it means to be in relationship with others, and ideas for how we can work collectively to manifest the kinds of intimacy we desire.

queering intimacy workbook: questions and exercises

To run this zine as a workshop, we recommend having participants sitting in a circle, with a whiteboard visible to all where ideas can be written down as they come up. The following text can be used as a script for the workshop; we have also included suggestions for what size of group might work best for each discussion point.

This workbook/workshop aims to take a critical look at conventional ideas of intimacy and relationships, with a focus on the ways in which amatonormative,[2] heteronormative, ableist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy presents us with only a very limited set of approved options for relating to others (both human and other-than-human). From this starting point, we want to encourage you to come up with some different methods for resisting these norms, and for practising and imagining alternate ways of relating to one another and building intimacy.

Discussion around relationships and intimacy often takes place within the framework of romance and sexuality. Whilst these ways of relating are important to many people, we think that something is lost when we limit our understanding of these concepts in such a way. In this workbook we ask the question:

[2] The notion that the primary and most important relationship in your life should be a romantic, monogamous one.

How can we expand ideas of relationship and intimacy beyond the romantic and sexual, and what new possibilities does this offer us?

Enlarging our idea of intimacy could mean coming into deeper, conscious relationship with the non-human: animals, environment (both 'natural' and 'manmade'), plants, technology and so on. Or it could be about expanding relationship anarchy discourse, which still focuses on certain kinds of human-human interaction. We can question the concepts of sex and romance themselves - and often when we do, we find their definitions to be nebulous and fluid. And how does this in turn affect the ideas of asexuality and aromanticism: if we cannot clearly define sex or romance, how do we conceptualise their lack?

Throughout this workbook we hope to create a space for expanding - and perhaps even doing away with - terms like romance, sex, intimacy, friend, lover, family, pet, community. We want to blur the lines between these categories and create space for new ways of being-with. We want to imagine and experience radical interactions with each other, with the non-human, with the environment. We hope that this workbook will provide an inclusive and inspiring starting point for these conversations.

This might be a good time to do introductory go-rounds, with participants sharing their name and pronouns. You could also include an ice-breaker question or a grounding exercise, inviting people to take a few deep breaths to settle into the space.

Let's begin with the basics. What are the first things that come to mind when you hear the word 'intimacy'? *Whole group activity: write up answers on a whiteboard. Or journal your thoughts below.*

What sort of words came up for you? If you are doing this exercise in a group, did other people think of similar or different things? Were they mostly positive, negative or mixed feelings words? Was the focus mainly on sex and romance, or on human relationships? Did you or anyone else talk about politics, community, the non-human, or barriers to intimacy? What does the overall group response say about the larger culture that we're exposed to around intimacy?

These questions can be discussed within the group, or used as further journaling prompts.

For many people, the word 'intimacy' can be off-putting. It might invoke feelings of fear and uncertainty, or vulnerability and letting one's guard down. It is often thought of in relation to sex - both positively and negatively - as well as trauma. There can be many barriers to intimacy, and the word itself may feel cloying or smothering, unobtainable or undesirable. It may remind us of (compulsory) heterosexuality and heteronormativity.

It is important to acknowledge the many negative connotations of intimacy. The society we live in is one which simultaneously holds up the desirability of intimacy within cishet monogamous romantic relationships, whilst also creating multiple barriers to many kinds of meaningful intimacy, such as austerity, fractured communities, mass migration, poverty, capitalist alienation and so on. Restricting our understanding of intimacy to the sole form found within cishet monogamy leads to the shaming of

women, LGBTQ folk, people of colour, working class people, sex workers and disabled people for their expression of alternative forms of intimacy. And because so many of us have experienced structural oppression and/or sexual trauma, it can be very difficult to foster intimacy in our human-human interactions, and create the trust that is often necessary to allow intimacy to flourish.

We are taught that there are only certain forms of intimacy that are desirable and real, and these usually fall along the lines of exclusive romantic and sexual pairings. There are only certain people we are expected to become intimate with, and any intimacy with non-human animals, plants and the rest of the non-human world is either dismissed as frivolous or weird (think of the sexist, ableist 'crazy cat lady' stereotype), or simply assumed not to exist. These norms shut down alternative ways of experiencing the world and ways of being in relationship. They can also be actively harmful when we are forced to participate in conventions of intimacy that fail to make space for queer and trans people, neurodiverse and disabled folk, people of colour, those from non-Western societies, sex workers, and anyone else who falls outside of rich, straight, white, abled, cisgender personhood.

Can you think of times when you have felt uncomfortable with, alienated by, or even harmed by conventional forms of intimacy? How did others' ignorance, prejudices or actions affect your relationships or intimacies?

If you are running this as a group, discuss these questions in small groups before feeding back to everyone else.

Are there any commonalities between people's experiences? Can you link your own personal experiences to any of the overarching structural oppressions we have discussed so far? (eg sexism, racism, homo-, bi- or transphobia, ableism). Did you feel able to push back against any of these systems in the moment (it's ok if not!)?

One way that intimacy is constrained by heteronormative society is through the model of the relationship escalator. The relationship escalator works on the assumption that one's goal in relationships is to form a single, life-long romantically and sexually monogamous relationship, which includes marriage, children, and living together. Because this is the default model in society, any relationship we are part of must be categorised as either platonic or romantic (because the two are mutually exclusive here), and, if it is romantic, it is expected to progress in a predefined, normative way.

The standard relationship escalator looks something like: dating > becoming romantically and sexually exclusive > meeting family and friends > living together > getting engaged > becoming financially enmeshed > marriage > having children. Obviously the stages of the relationship escalator occur in a different order for different people, but the overall expectation is that a relationship will and must increase in intensity and commitment, that commitment is demonstrated through actions such as marriage and living together, and that both people want these things and they are normal – or even *natural* – things to want. There is also the expectation that your partner/spouse will be the main or only person who you go on holiday with, who cares for you when you are ill, who you share food and daily chores with, who attends events as your plus-one, and so on. Relationship anarchy challenges this escalator model, and asks that we consciously decide - along with the other people involved - exactly which parts of this model we want in our relationships. And of course, we may have multiple people in our lives fulfilling some or all of these roles - or none of them, if that's what we prefer!

Are you familiar with the relationship escalator model? Has it shown up in any of your current or past relationships? Which parts of it do you like, and which do you dislike? *Discuss in pairs and feed back to the group.*

Again, see if there are any commonalities between folks' experiences. Are there any aspects of the relationship escalator that are seen as particularly desirable or undesirable? Have you felt pressured to commit to parts of the model that didn't feel right for you?

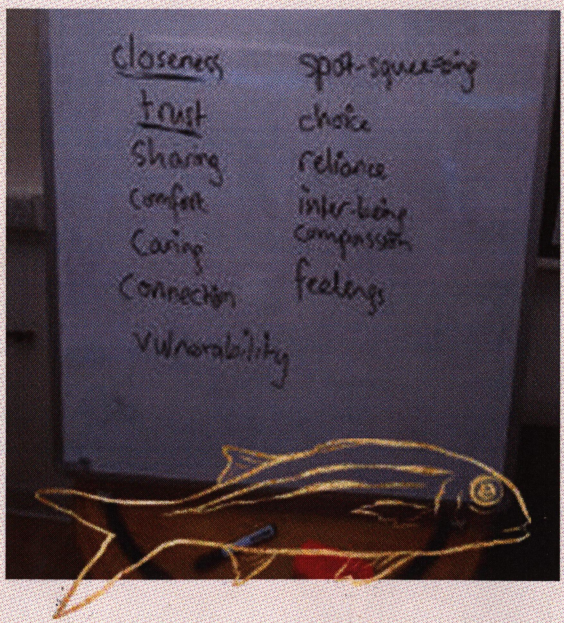
These questions can be discussed within the group, or used as further journaling prompts.

Hopefully the last few exercises have been useful for having a brief look at conventional forms of intimacy, their potential to harm, constrain and exclude many kinds of people and relationships, and how this might have shown up in your life so far. Given this complex history of intimacy, do you think there is space within the concept to express something more positive

and expansive? What could intimacy look like for you and those who are important to you? What role do you *want* it to play in your life?

If you're running this as a workshop then you can discuss this in small groups, before feeding back to the larger group. If you're on your own, then feel free to write down some thoughts below.

What sort of things did you come up with? Was it easy to think of positive examples of intimacy? Do you think it's useful to try and reframe intimacy in this way, or do we need to come up with a completely new concept, free from intimacy's troubled connotations?



Some of the answers given by participants at one of our workshops

We have found it useful to rethink intimacy as **familiarity plus affection**. This takes intimacy outside of the sexual realm, and instead lets us conceive of it as a kind of caring closeness which can be found and expressed in all kinds of relationships. Other concepts which we think can usefully be incorporated into intimacy include affinity, kinship, togetherness, comradeship, being-with, friendship, companionship and witnessing. It often includes an investment in the other's flourishing, pleasure and joy, even if only in a fleeting or superficial way. We include warmth, understanding, appreciation, connection, support and sharing as potential components of expansive intimacy.

Throughout the rest of this workbook, we will be using the word 'intimacy' to describe a relationship between one entity and another which includes any of the affective states described above. This linguistic looseness allows for a freer and fuller reimagining of intimacy - and hopefully is not too vague to be entirely useless! This is just one tactic though, and we remain open to the possibility of doing away with the concept of intimacy entirely, and/or reframing it otherwise.

Let's now try to think beyond sexual and romantic intimacy for a while. What other kinds of intimacy do we experience? In which other parts of our lives, and in which other relationships, do we experience familiarity, affection, care, and closeness? Who or which entities are involved in these relationships? Some more familiar kinds of intimacy might be emotional, intellectual, or spiritual, for example; take some time and try to come up with as many different kinds of intimacy as you can think of, in as many spheres of life as possible.

Create a list on the whiteboard, taking suggestions from the group. You could do a go-round to ensure that everyone's ideas are incorporated. If you are on your own, you could set a timer for a minute and try to come up with as many different forms of intimacy as you can - never mind how unusual they might seem! You can write down your ideas on the following page.

What kinds of intimacy did you come up with? Here is a list we've compiled of different intimacies, and examples of how they might show up in your life. Many of the activities we mention have a lot of overlap and could be the source of multiple different intimacies, but we've tried to group them somewhat coherently! Do they resonate with you? Did you think of other intimacies that we've left out? There's some space at the end of this list where you can add any extra intimacies you think of.

- **intellectual** - studying together, discussing abstract concepts, debating

- **activity-based** - doing the same activities together, anything from gardening to being on a sports team, from the strangers who do the same commute as you every day, to people you only meet once because you drunkenly met in a pub one night

- **experiential** - arising from shared experiences, eg that sense of connection with the only other queer or disabled person around, when you're in a room of straight or abled people

- **emotional** - talking about feelings together, providing emotional support for each other

- **sexual** - doing sexual activities together, however you define that
- **kink** - engaging in kink scenes/play (obviously this is sexual for some people too!)
- **sensual** - cuddling, massages, stroking someone's hair - for some people these overlap with sexual intimacy
- **familial** - with genetic or chosen family, perhaps sharing a long history with one another and/or caring for each other
- **cohabitational** - when you live with one or more other people, plants, and animals
- **cross-species** - cuddling or caring for a pet, looking after house plants, growing vegetables, climbing a tree
- **spiritual/religious** - worshipping, praying or doing ritual together, sharing spiritual experiences, being part of a religious or spiritual community
- **political** - doing activism together, being part of the same affinity group, attending protests together
- **institutional** - being in the same cohort or training group, being work colleagues, studying at university together
- **technological** - either: intimacies mediated via technology like phone or video calls, or: the intimacies we have with technological devices, like our familiarity with our phones and laptops, and how we keep them close by and touch them frequently throughout the day
- **historical/ancestral** - connections to the past, whether via familial ties or through affinity with historical or local figures, eg queers of the past

- **mentorship** - relationships involving guidance, counselling, tutelage

- **geographical** - familiarity with the place around you, whether that is long-term intimacy arising from having lived in the same place for years, or briefer intimacies with places you only visit once

- **environmental** - swimming in the sea, being attentive to the local bioregion, observing the cycles of the moon and the seasons, walking the same route every day

- **hobby-based** - the familiarity you have with the tools you might use for hobbies, like paintbrushes or musical instruments or a climbing harness; the warmth and affection you feel for a special interest, whether it is new and exciting or familiar and years-long

- **mobility-based** - connection with our bikes, wheelchairs, cars, canes, skates etc

- **financial** - sharing finances or having a relationship mediated by money (eg employees and employers)

- **readerly** - through reading someone's work (and its converse, writerly intimacy!)

Add any additional intimacies here:

We now have a huge range of intimacies to consider! Take some time to consider the following questions: which intimacies feel important to you? Which of these are new to you? Which

do you wish you had more of in your life, and what sort of relationship structures might foster these intimacies? *Discuss in small groups or journal below.*

Hopefully by now you'll have some idea of the kind of intimacies that feel relevant and nourishing in your life. Not all of these intimacies fit neatly within the confines of romantic, sexually monogamous coupledom, so we are now going to create a tool which can be used to navigate new kinds of intimacy in intra-human relationships. Based on the idea of a sex menu (a list of sexual activities that you consider with a partner, and indicate your interest in each thing with either a yes, no or maybe), we propose the construction of an intimacy menu. What kind of intimate acts might you want to do with someone else? Different relationships will foster different kinds of connection and closeness, but for now, let's create a 'master list' that can be narrowed down and edited in particular situations. Obviously, this has the potential to become a huge list, and it would be impossible to list every single thing you might conceivably want to do with someone else, so just try to come up with as many different ideas as you want to, for as long as feels good for now. You can always add more in the future!

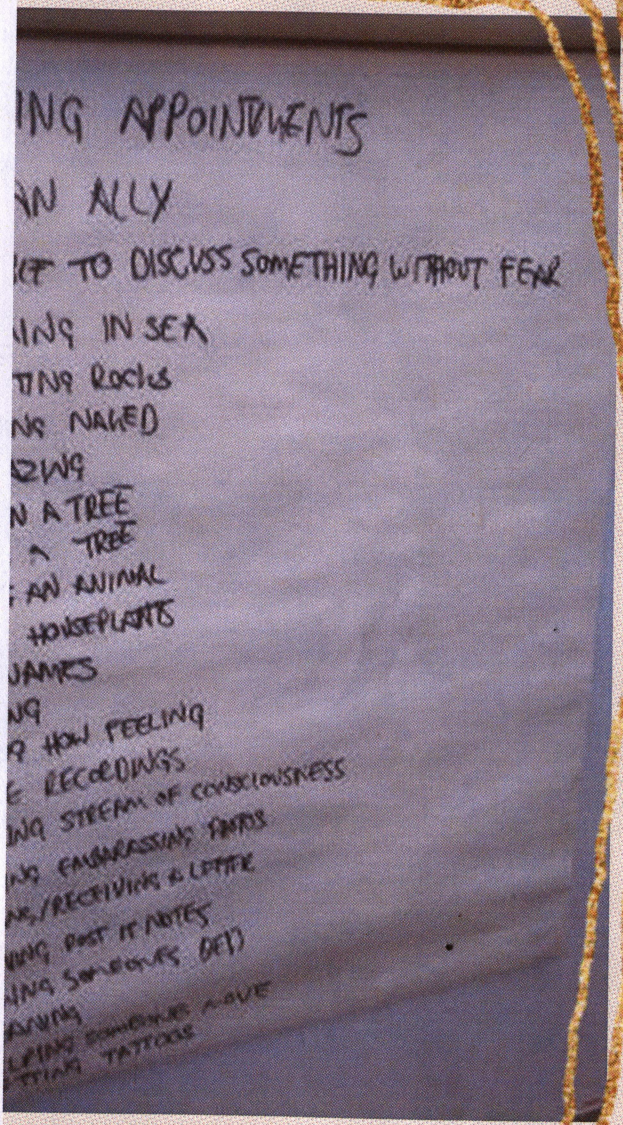
Here are a few activities to start you off:

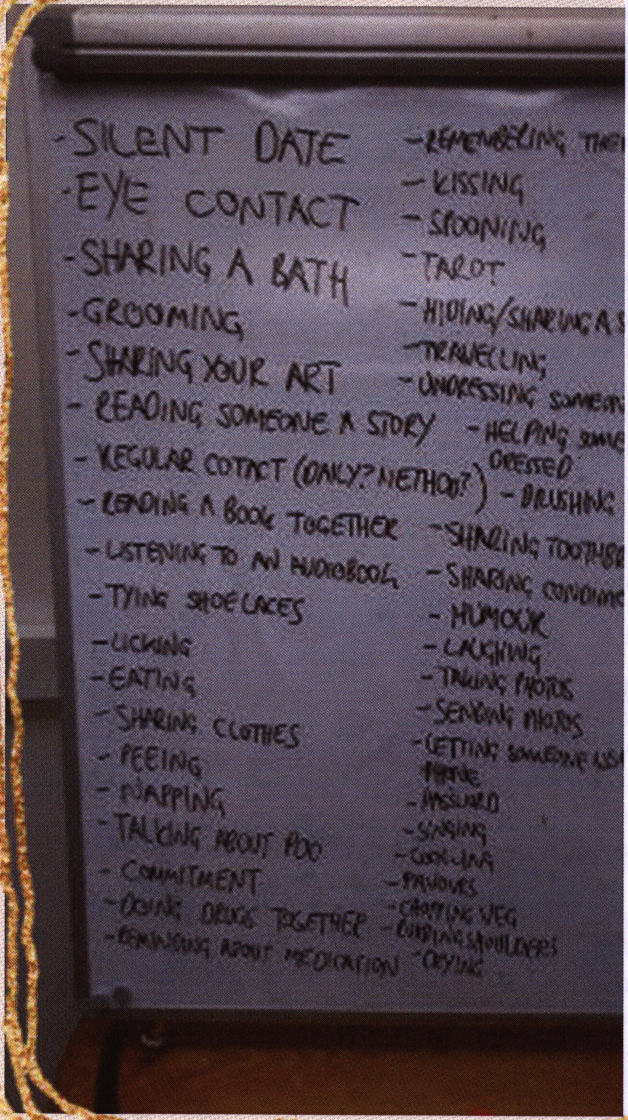
- ♥ cuddling
- ♥ living together
- ♥ making eye contact
- ♥ sharing your art
- ♥ sharing a bath
- ♥ grooming
- ♥ starting a housing co-op or intentional community

- ♥ peeing in front of each other
- ♥ napping
- ♥ sharing clothes
- ♥ doing drugs together
- ♥ reminding someone about medication
- ♥ sharing condiments
- ♥ preparing food
- ♥ sharing passwords
- ♥ lending a book
- ♥ remembering someone's routine
- ♥ raising children together

Take ideas from the whole group and write them on a whiteboard, using the go-round format, or journal your own ideas down below:

You now have the beginnings of an intimacy menu that can be shared and discussed with the people you care about. Each relationship will of course engender specific intimacies and types of care. It might be useful to think back to the idea of the relationship escalator – if we find this model of relating constrictive or unappealing, how else might we show commitment within a relationship (if we want to)? How do the activities you came up with differ in terms of level of intimacy? Do some forms of intimacy only arise when a certain level of commitment is involved in a relationship – and can certain activities function as a statement or reinforcement of that commitment, if the usual ones do not appeal to us? Furthermore, how can we validate and treat with importance those relationships and intimacies which feature *less*


NG APPOINTMENTS
N ALLY
TO DISCUSS SOMETHING WITHOUT FEAR
NG IN SEA
NG ROCKS
NS NAKED
ING
N A TREE
TREE
AN ANIMAL
HOUSEPLANTS
JAMES
NG
HOW FEELING
RECORDINGS
NG STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS
NG EMBARRASSING PHOTOS
S/RECEIVING A LETTER
NG POST IT NOTES
NG SOMEONE ELSE
TATTOOS


-SILENT DATE
-EYE CONTACT
-SHARING A BATH
-GROOMING
-SHARING YOUR ART
-READING SOMEONE A STORY
-REGULAR CONTACT (ONLY? METHOD?)
-READING A BOOK TOGETHER
-LISTENING TO AN AUDIOBOOK
-TYING SHOELACES
-LICKING
-EATING
-SHARING CLOTHES
-PEEING
-NAPPING
-TALKING ABOUT POO
-COMMITMENT
-DOING DRUGS TOGETHER
-REMINISCING ABOUT MEDICATION
-REMEMBERING THE
-KISSING
-SPOONING
-TAROT
-HIDING/SHARING A
-TRAVELLING
-UNDRESSING SOMEON
-HELPING SOME
DRESSED
-BRUSHING
-SHARING TOOTHB
-SHARING CONDOM
-HUMOUR
-LAUGHING
-TAKING PHOTOS
-SENDING PHOTOS
-GETTING SOMEONE A
HANDLE
-MASSAGE
-SINGING
-COOKING
-PROMISES
-CHOPPING VEG
-RUBBING SHOULDERS
-CRYING

commitment – the ones which are often seen as trivial, frivolous or unimportant by society? *Feel free to journal any additional thoughts you have here, or discuss in small groups.*

Roadblocks to queering intimacy

By now you should have a better idea of the kinds of intimacies that appeal to you, and what you might like to encourage more of in your own life. This knowledge in itself can be a really powerful thing. But before we finish, let's take a moment to explore the kinds of problems that often come up when we try to move outside of normative relationship scripts.

The biggest problem we've come up against in our own lives is the fact that, regardless of individual desires, we live in a controlling capitalist society which has negative material impacts on our lives. It might seem obvious to say that, but it has such wide-ranging effects that we must acknowledge the reality of the actually existing legal, financial, and other material constraints which affect our ability to build relationship structures outside of the norm. These all-pervasive systems are set up to promote and reinforce the nuclear family, and their existence affects our daily lives and interpersonal relationships without our consent. Of course, struggle and resistance are always possible, but the power of the state to legitimise and reward certain kinds of relationships - and ignore or criminalise others - is an unfortunate truth of our current reality. Because of this, we are often coerced into presenting or performing our

relationships in ways that are legible to the state - or risk losing access to money, housing, healthcare and so on.

This means that no matter how much we strive to create fulfilling lives for ourselves, we are non-consensually affected by these coercive state structures in our interpersonal relationships. For example, institutions like marriage affect multiple areas of our lives, from legal next-of-kin and tax breaks, to inheritance, parental rights and immigration status. Thus, entering into marriage with one person creates a legal and financial hierarchy which may previously not have existed in that relationship; this hierarchy will materially affect your other relationships, even if your feelings, emotions, commitments etc have not otherwise changed. The currently existing legal, financial, and welfare systems do not usually recognise relationships involving multiple adults (and their children, if they have them), and finding ways to navigate these systems when you are part of a non-normative kinship group can be exhausting and sometimes impossible. Beyond legal issues, there are obviously day-to-day social norms which we have to navigate, even if we reject them at the same time. Each of us needs to decide the extent to which we want (and are able or unable) to be 'out' about non-normative relationship practices and intimacies. Examples of this include introducing partners to friends, family or colleagues, or expressing certain forms of affection in public.

On a more everyday level, it can simply be practically difficult to find people who want similar things to you. Even within queer and non-monogamous circles, people's wishes and desires can vary hugely, as can their capacity for making those things happen (and of course, it can often be very hard to even find other queer/ ace/ non-monogamous etc people, depending on where you live and what your access needs are). Capitalism structures our days and lives acutely; having to participate in a coercive work culture which drains us of our time and energy means there are less of those resources available to put into interpersonal relationships: though love and desire may be infinite, time and energy are not. Being unable to find those

who share our desires, or being unable to build fulfilling relationships due to lack of resources, can be frustrating, disappointing, isolating and upsetting. It can be easy to retreat into the perceived security of marriage and monogamy when everyone else around us is doing the same. Focusing on friendship and community instead is in opposition to the societal and financial structures around us.

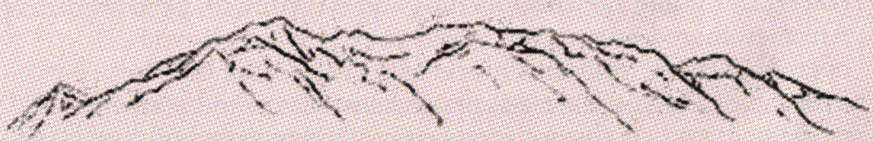
We don't think there are any easy solutions to this, though we have found that being able to acknowledge some of these disappointments as caused by external structures and systemic oppression - rather than personal failures or inadequacies - can help with processing negative emotions and refocusing our energies. Our individual struggles to create the lives we want cannot be divorced from the collective struggle to end capitalism and all forms of structural oppression. Working on both aspects in tandem allows us to move towards a world that is more free, just and loving - but it's important to acknowledge that it is hard work!

All of this is not to say that there is no point trying to build the relationships and intimacies that you desire - there absolutely is! Though our lives are shaped by the society we live in, we still maintain autonomy and choice, and the potential to create powerful and fulfilling intimacies in our lives remains present. We include this section because we feel it is a subject that is often overlooked in literature and discussions about relationship anarchy, and ignorance of these subjects can lead to problems in relationships which could potentially have been avoided with more prior knowledge.

Take some time now to journal on the following page, or discuss as a group, any material conditions which may prevent you from finding the relationships and intimacy that you want. Are they shared by people around you? How might you overcome them, individually and as a group? *Can* they be overcome? Do you have a support network around you who could help you on this journey - or could you start building one?

Conclusion

We hope that this workbook/ workshop has been engaging and useful for you! The topic of queering intimacy is a big one, so we hope that this has been a good introduction to the subject, and a starting point for further explorations. As a closing exercise, we suggest doing a go-round (if you are in a group), or journal below (if you're on your own), one or two ideas from the workshop that you would like to implement in your daily life. If you have any feedback on the zine, we once again invite you to get in touch at lettersfrommars@protonmail.com - we'd love to hear from you!



a queering intimacy manifesto

Intimacy does not reside solely within the realm of sexuality. Intimacy comes in many forms: emotional, physical, spiritual, technological, sexual, environmental, cross-species, and more. All forms of intimacy are valuable, and resisting the enclosure of intimacy within sexual, romantic and monogamous relationships expands our capacity for connecting with others and building solidarity.

Relationships and intimacies do not exist solely between humans. We acknowledge and cherish our relationships with other living beings, as well as our relationships with the spaces we inhabit, the tools that we use, the communities we are part of, the sources of spirituality that surround us (for those of us who acknowledge them), and the land that we live on. We do not see humans as individual autonomous beings, rather we value the interdependence, symbiosis and reciprocal care-giving which we are part of and which extends to the entirety of the world around us. We believe that extra-human relationships and intimacies are opportunities for pleasure, joy and connection.

In all of our relationships, we strive towards non-hierarchy and a lack of coercion and domination. We acknowledge the difficulty of this whilst living in an oppressive society. We model our interpersonal relationships on our work for collective liberation; we are influenced by and strive for gender abolition, disability justice, youth liberation, environmental justice, animal liberation, queer liberation, and an end to white supremacy and capitalism.

Truly informed consent is impossible under capitalism. Since we live in a non-consensual society, our choices and actions are almost always constrained in some way, and the notion of freely choosing something, in this context, simply doesn't make sense.

Nevertheless, we strive towards consent as a horizon: checking in with ourselves and others, whilst working to make the world a more consensual place overall.

We oppose the structures of the couple form and the primary partner. We do not believe that society functions well when we see ourselves as individuals searching for our 'other halves' - this is a myth that prevents us from dreaming and working communally, for and with a multitude of others. We find the respectability bestowed upon couples repulsive; we acknowledge its link with the institution of marriage; and we work towards a society founded on collective care, where all relationships are valued and where we are empowered to create the relationships we desire.

We are marriage abolitionists. We do not believe in states, or state interference in our lives. We do not believe that marriage should be the means by which some of us access healthcare, visiting rights, financial security and so on. Rather than seeking to extend marriage as a legal right to more groups of people, we call for the abolition of marriage and, in tandem, a reconfiguring of society which provides healthcare, shelter, food, care and conviviality to all. The institution of marriage was founded up capitalism, private property, the idea of women and children as property, racial purity, homo- and transphobia, and colonialism, and we think it should be abolished rather than reappropriated. We are opposed to the privatisation of love and care within marriage and the nuclear family. Non-legal 'celebrations of love', as an alternative to marriage, also reinforce this individualisation and privatisation of communal affects.

There is no clear definition of romance that makes sense to us. Either everything has the potential to be romantic, or nothing does - it is naught but a social construct which feeds into the celebration of the couple form and the institution of marriage. Rather than seeking to define romance, we wish to do away

with it entirely, and instead allow the concepts which are attached to it - love, lust, excitement, thoughtfulness, cherishment, attentiveness, devotion - to show up freely in all kinds of relationships, as and when they arise.

Sexual experiences do not solely rely on genital sex. Like romance, a lot of things can be sexual for some and completely nonsexual for others. Seeking to define exactly what 'counts' as sex is a fool's errand, and further reifies the false dichotomy between sexual and asexual. We prefer to explore the erotic - with a sensuous hat-tip to Audre Lorde - as a pleasurable and creative force found in multiple loci, a force which is resistant to attempts to capture and define it in totalising ways. Pleasure and attraction show up in many different ways and cannot be contained within sex, romance, monogamy, the couple, or marriage.

Friendship is a vital and important part of many relationships. The word 'friend' comes from the same root as 'free', and in friendship we see the radical possibility for extending comradeship, conviviality, and care to multiple others. Though society coerces us into focusing our love and attention solely on our romantic partnerships and family relations, when we see friendship as the primary organising force our of relationships, we are able to locate ourselves within an interconnected, nourishing, co-creative web of others. Friendship networks not only provide joy and support, they also prepare us for collective struggle and acts of solidarity and mutual aid.

We believe in the power of dreaming, of imagining collective utopias, of demanding the impossible. We believe in a liberated world, free from domination and oppression, where we live lives of abundance, connection, exploration, pleasure, and interdependence. By transforming our relationships with others, we work towards this revolutionary horizon; queering intimacy is just one tiny step on the way towards this freer world.

further reading

AN, *The Queer Lonely Diaries* zine

Anarchism and Polyamory zine, Dysophia #1

Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, *The Anti-Social Family*

Zoe Belinsky, 'Not Relationship Anarchism, But Relationship Communism: Some Thoughts on the Failures of Relationship/ Lifestyle Politics'

carla bergman and Nick Montgomery, *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times*

cam, 'Down with Partners'

C.E., 'Undoing Sex: Against Sexual Optimism' in *Lies: a Journal of Materialist Feminism*

Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering and Queer Affect*

Clémence X. Clementine, 'Against the Couple Form' in *Lies: a Journal of Materialist Feminism*

Rhaina Cohen, 'What if friendship, not marriage, was at the center of life?'

Communities Not Couples website

Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*

Jessica Fern, *Polysecure: Attachment, Trauma and Consensual Nonmonogamy*

Michel Foucault, 'Friendship as a way of life' in *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume One - Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow

FUCKED: on being sexually dysfunctional in sex-positive queer scenes and *2FUCKED 2FURIOUS: still sexually dysfunctional in sex-positive queer scenes* zines

KD Griffiths and JJ Gleeson, *Kinderkommunismus: a feminist analysis of the 21st-century family and a communist proposal for its abolition*

Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto* and *Staying with the Trouble*

Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*

Jamie Heckert and Richard Cleminson (eds), *Anarchism and Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power*

bell hooks, *All About Love*

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*

Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now* and 'My Octopus Girlfriend'

Audre Lorde, 'The Uses of the Erotic'

Clementine Morrigan, *Love Without Emergency: I want this but I feel like I'm going to die* and 'Trauma-Informed Polyamory' workshop

NO! Against Adult Supremacy anthology

Andie Nordgren, 'The short instructional manifesto for relationship anarchy'

ME O'Brien, 'Communizing Care' in *PINKO* #1

Pals: the radical possibilities of friendship zine

Ela Przybylo, *Asexual Erotics*

Reed Puc, 'SEXUALITY AS PRAXIS: on partition vs action in transition'

Queering Friendships from Mixed Rice zines

RAD unconference's list of relationship anarchy resources, available at https://tinylink.net/kgOAl

A Radical TransFeminist, 'The Ethical Prude: Imagining An Authentic Sex-Negative Feminism'

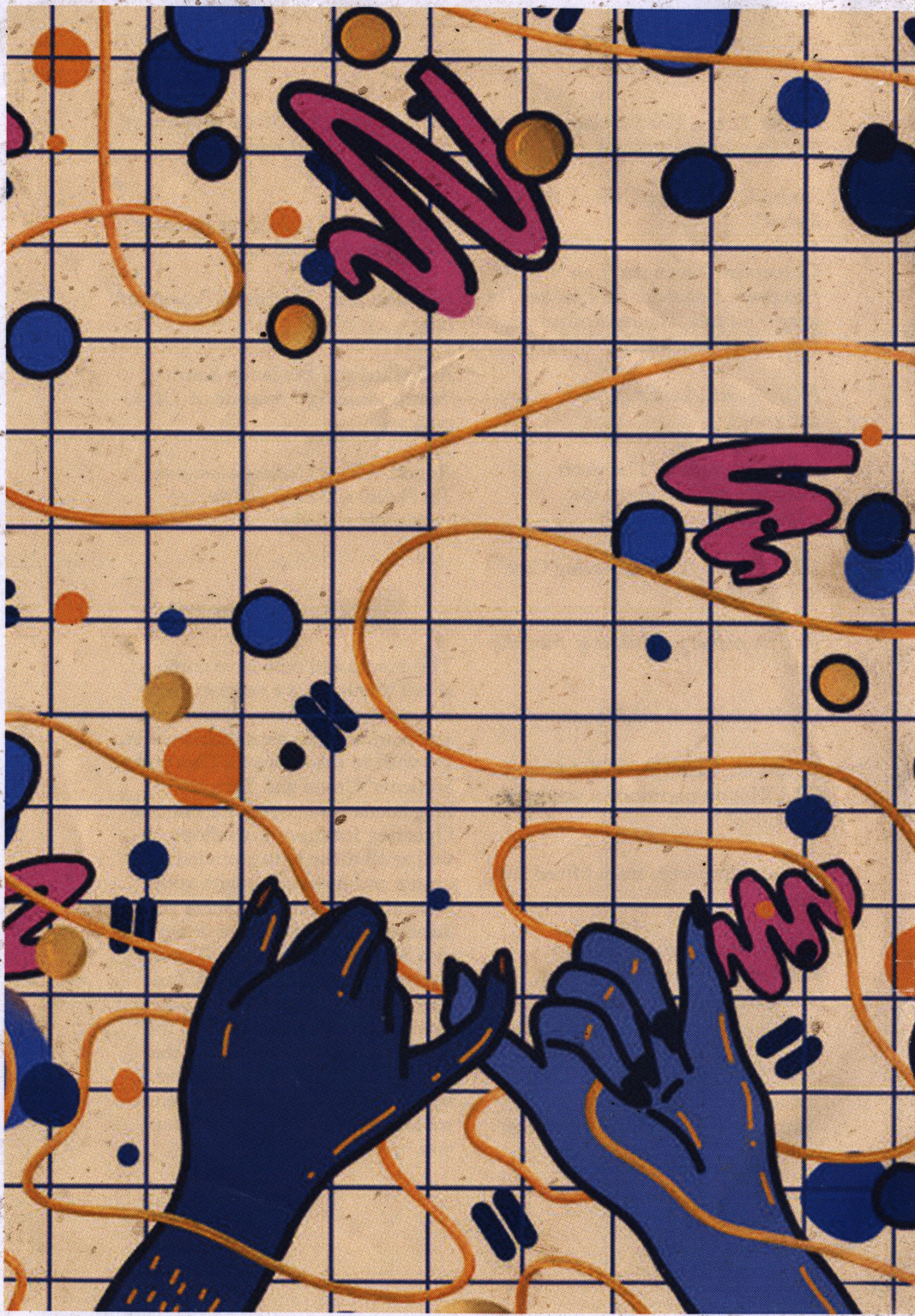
Alexis Shotwell, 'Ethical polyamory, responsibility and significant otherness'

Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle, *Here Come the Ecosexuals!*

Kim TallBear, *The Critical Polyamorist* blog

Alie Ward and Benjamin Karney, 'Matrimoniology' episode of *Ologies* podcast

Angela Willey, *Undoing Monogamy: The Politics of Science and the Possibilities of Biology*

acknowledgements

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